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## The Future of the Kurdish Diaspora

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Östen Wahlbeck

## The Future of the Kurdish Diaspora

The Kurdish communities outside of Kurdistan increasingly constitute a global diaspora. Well-established Kurdish communities are found all over the world and they form new ethnic minorities in the countries of settlement. Yet, these communities continue to be characterised by the various political developments in Kurdistan, including wars, genocide and forced migration that have occurred in the Kurdish regions in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. The successive waves of Kurdish political refugees that have arrived in the Kurdish diaspora have significantly influenced the processes of community formation and social integration of the diaspora.

Large numbers of refugees have been forced to flee Kurdistan since the 1960s and the largest communities can be found in Europe<sup>1</sup>, especially in Germany<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the focus in this article is on

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<sup>1</sup> Östen Wahlbeck, "Kurds in Europe: From Labor Migrants to Asylum Seekers," in *Kurdish Exodus: From Internal Displacement to Diaspora*, ed. by Mohammed M. A. Ahmed and Michael M. Gunter (Sharon, Massachusetts: Ahmed Foundation for Kurdish Studies, 2002), pp. 73-101; Amir Hassanpour and Shahrzad Mojab, "Kurdish Diaspora," in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures around the World*, ed. by Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember, and Ian A. Skoggard (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2004), pp. 214-24.

<sup>2</sup> Birgit Ammann, "Kurds in Germany," in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas*, pp. 1011-9.

Europe, but the developments in Europe also have a relevance for the increasing numbers of Kurds in the rest of the world. According to diaspora theories, time has to pass in order to assess whether a minority community forms a diaspora, or whether the community follows another integration or assimilation trajectory. Diasporas have been defined as expatriate communities that are characterised by their specific relation to a real or imagined homeland.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the “homeland” has to be understood as an idea; it is actually dislocation and relocation in relation to an idea of a homeland that characterises the diaspora.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the concept of diaspora has been useful to describe the processes of social organisation, transnational relations and community formation connected to dislocation and exile<sup>5</sup>. The perception of the “homeland” and the political projects connected to it are often significantly influenced by some type of traumatic collective history, which in various ways can be interpreted by members of the diaspora community. The Kurdish diasporas have been characterised by a discourse focused on the Kurds as victims of persecution, a discourse that is central in maintaining the politicised aspects of the Kurdish diasporas and can be used to motivate transnational political mobilisation<sup>6</sup>. In short, the history of forced migration and the political mobilisation of the community are central for an understanding of the global Kurdish diaspora.

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<sup>3</sup> William Safran, “Diasporas in modern societies: myths of homeland and return,” *Diaspora* 1 (1991), pp. 83-99; Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Minoo Alinia et al., “The Kurdish Diaspora: Transnational Ties, Home, and the Politics of Belonging,” *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 4 (2014), 2, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> Östen Wahlbeck, “The Concept of Diaspora as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Refugee Communities,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28 (2002), pp. 221-38.

<sup>6</sup> Khalid Khayati, *From Victim Diaspora to Transborder Citizenship? Diaspora formation and transnational relations among Kurds in France and Sweden* (Linköping: Linköping University, 2008).

In the case of the Kurds in Europe, the communities already have a long migration history, which is briefly outlined in this article from the post-war period up until the European refugee crisis of 2015. The existing research on the Kurdish diaspora in Europe indicates that the communities have been significantly influenced by the continuous arrival of new groups of Kurdish migrants and refugees, as well as the subsequent transnational social, political and cultural relations between the diaspora and Kurdistan. The continuous transnationalism of a global Kurdish community has enabled the formation of a politically, socially and culturally informed community which fulfills the traditional characteristics of a diaspora group. Subsequent generations of Kurds tend to continue to identify as Kurds and display a diasporic relationship to Kurdistan. This all indicates that there will be sizeable and permanent Kurdish diasporas in Europe in the future as well. Yet, it can also be foreseen that the relative importance of Europe as a center of the diaspora will diminish in the future, because of the increasing number of Kurdish refugees and migrants worldwide.

The article describes changes in migration patterns, as well as the integration of the Kurdish communities as distinct social, cultural and political communities in Europe. This development also has a significance beyond the case of Europe, and it can be assumed that similar patterns in the formation of Kurdish communities can be found in countries all over the world. The case of Europe provides a possibility to foresee the future developments of the global Kurdish diaspora. The first part of the article provides an overview of the major migration patterns and provides an estimate of the size of the Kurdish population in Europe. The article concludes with a discussion of the possible future developments of the Kurdish diaspora.

### **From Labour Migrants to Asylum Seekers**

Kurdish labour migrants from Turkey began arriving in Western Europe in the late 1950s and in larger numbers in the 1960s. Most of the migrants came to Germany, but the Netherlands, France and a number of other Western European countries also actively recruited workers from Turkey.<sup>7</sup> Because of this labour migration, Kurds originating from Turkey constitute a majority of the Kurds in Europe. Nevertheless, many Western European countries also have substantial communities of Kurds from Iran and Iraq, as well as smaller numbers from Syria. In addition to labour migrants from Turkey, Kurdish students and academics from Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria have arrived in small numbers in Europe since the 1960s. These intellectuals have been significant in the political and cultural activities of the Kurds in exile, but in terms of numbers, they only constitute a small minority.

The active recruitment of migrant labour came to an end in all European countries in the early 1970s,<sup>8</sup> but this did not constitute an end to the migration of Kurds to Europe. In addition to family reunions and visiting students, an increasing number of Kurdish refugees and asylum seekers arrived in Europe. Because of various political and humanitarian crises in different parts of Kurdistan, successive waves of Kurdish political refugees have been forced to seek asylum outside the Middle East, and Western Europe has until today been the main destination. In the 1980s and 1990s, the arrival of large numbers of Kurdish asylum seekers significantly increased the number of Kurds in Western Europe. Although a clear majority of the Kurds in Europe originate from Turkey, the Kurds from Iraq have since the 1990s dominated the influx of asylum seekers, and refugees

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<sup>7</sup> Nermin Abadan-Unat, *Turks in Europe: From Guest Workers to Transnational Citizens* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Castles, Hein de Haas, and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (London: Macmillan, 2013), p. 102-11.

from Iran have a long history in Europe. A more recent development is the humanitarian disaster in the wake of the wars in Syria and Iraq in the 2010s, which may have various consequences for the migration patterns of Kurds. Clearly, the emergence of a Kurdish diaspora cannot be understood without a consideration of the political developments in the Middle East.

The change in the legal status of the migrants, from the status of labour migrants in the post-war period to the status of asylum seekers from the 1990s onwards, was not necessarily connected to a historical change in the characteristic of the Kurds arriving in Europe. Economic and political factors are always intertwined, and both factors have influenced both the early labour migrants, as well as the later asylum seekers. Rather, the increase in the proportion of refugees can largely be seen as a consequence of the changing immigration policies in the European countries. Kurds applying for asylum would previously have been able to arrive as labour migrants without the extra effort connected to asylum applications. Due to increasingly restrictive European migration policies, including a complete halt to labour migration, applying for asylum has been the only possible way for Kurds to migrate to Europe since the 1980s. Thus, the specific reception and resettlement policies of the respective country of settlement play a large role for the Kurdish diaspora.

The labour migration from Turkey has been the single most important historical event that explains the size of the Kurdish communities in Europe, but the presence of large numbers of political refugees has had a great social, cultural and political impact on the Kurdish communities in Europe.

Some Turkish citizens arrived as refugees in Europe as early as in the beginning of the 1960s,<sup>9</sup> but the number of Kurdish asylum seekers from Turkey significantly increased in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The increase in this number was related to the development of the violent conflict between the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Turkish army. Various crises and wars in Iraq have also produced a large number of Kurdish refugees. Previously, these refugees were often able to find asylum in the Middle East. However, in the late 1990s, growing numbers of Kurds from Iraq arrived to seek asylum in Europe. In the autumn of 2000, Iraqi citizens became the largest group of asylum seekers in Europe, outnumbering refugees from war-ridden Yugoslavia. Due to the influx of large numbers of refugees in the late 1990s, the proportion of Kurds from Iraq significantly increased in the Kurdish communities in Europe.<sup>10</sup> The relatively peaceful situation in the Kurdish areas in Northern Iraq in the 2000s diminished the number of asylum seekers, but refugees from Iraq continue to constitute one of the largest groups of refugees in Europe in the 2000s and this group continues to include Kurds. In total numbers, Iranian Kurds have not been as numerous as Kurds from Turkey and Iraq, but there has been a steady flow of refugees from Iran since the revolution in 1979. Some Western countries (e.g. Canada, France, Germany, Sweden and the USA) have experienced large numbers of refugees from Iran. The number of Syrian Kurds in the diaspora has been much smaller than the number from Turkey, Iraq and Iran, mainly because of the smaller number of Kurds in Syria.

The fact that politically active refugees continuously arrive in Europe has significantly politicised the Kurdish diaspora. Furthermore, the continuous migration between various parts of Kurdistan

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<sup>9</sup> Jochen Blaschke, "Kurdische Communities in Deutschland und Westeuropa," in *Kurden im Exil* (Vol. 1) (Berlin: Edition Parabolis, 1991), pp. 2.1.1-15.

<sup>10</sup> Wahlbeck, "Kurds in Europe," pp. 79-80.

and the diaspora has established continuous and extensive social, political, cultural and economic ties between Kurdistan and the Kurdish diaspora. The Kurds maintain contacts with friends and relatives all over the world. There are various social, economic and political relationships and transnational networks between Kurds in the diaspora and in Kurdistan, as well as between members of Kurdish communities in different countries. Contacts are maintained through social media, telephone communications, and personal visits. Kurds also continue to have links to Kurdistan through the international Kurdish mass media, including newspapers, radio, and satellite television.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the Kurdish communities provide a good example of the concept of transnationalism, which among migration scholars has been an attempt to explore migrants' simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society, since contemporary migrants maintain various kinds of ties to their "homelands" at the same time that they are incorporated into the countries that receive them.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Size of the Kurdish Diaspora**

In most European countries, there is exact data available about the official number of migrants and refugees arriving in the country. The official number of asylum seekers may vary rapidly, because

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<sup>11</sup> Janroj Yilmaz Keles, *Media, Diaspora and Conflict: Nationalism and Identity Amongst Turkish and Kurdish Migrants in Europe* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2015); Jowan Mahmod, *Kurdish Diaspora Online: From Imagined Community to Managing Communities* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> For example, Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing simultaneity: a transnational social field perspective on society," *International Migration Review* 38 (2004), pp. 1002-39.



asylum seekers often move independently from one country to another. However, the national authorities in most European countries keep relatively accurate statistics about the permanently settled population of migrant origin, since most countries have register or census data about the population residing permanently in the country. Unfortunately, most of the existing statistical data refer to citizenship (or, in some cases, country of origin or country of birth). Only a few countries in Europe collect any form of information about ethnic identity or native language. In fact, in many European countries, ethnic monitoring is commonly regarded as a rather suspicious activity which the authorities avoid doing. Furthermore, in countries with ethnic monitoring, the fixed categories that are used are often unsuitable for people of Kurdish origin. For example, the ethnic categories commonly used by British authorities, (“Asian,” “British,” “Black,” “White,” “Mixed” “Chinese” or “Other”) are categories that the Kurds in the UK have difficulties to identify with and choose between.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, unlike many other ethnic groups, specific religious beliefs or practices are not issues that tend to define the Kurds as an ethnic group, which makes it impossible to use any information about membership in religious congregations as an indication of the size of the community.<sup>14</sup>

As a consequence, there are very few official figures about the size of the population that would identify themselves as Kurds. According to Hassanpour and Mojab, formal figures about the size of the *Kurdish-speaking* population are available in the case of Australia, Canada, Finland, New Zealand, and Switzerland.<sup>15</sup> However, the number of those who would identify themselves as Kurds

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<sup>13</sup> Östen Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas: A Comparative Study of Kurdish Refugee Communities* (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 114-6.

<sup>14</sup> Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*, p. 160–1.

<sup>15</sup> Hassanpour and Mojab, “Kurdish Diaspora,” p. 214.

may be larger than the official Kurdish-speaking population. Not all of those who define themselves as Kurds necessarily speak Kurdish as their first language, which largely is a consequence of assimilation policies. For example, many Kurds from Turkey speak Turkish as their first language. In addition, it is not certain that all newly arrived migrants know that they can declare Kurdish as their first language.

It is also possible to make some estimates with the help of the available official statistics that are based on citizenship and country of birth. Furthermore, there are estimates presented by Kurdish organisations, which can be used as guidelines, although the Kurdish organisations often seem to be tempted to exaggerate the number of Kurds. By comparing various estimates, and taking into account migration patterns in the late 1990s, Wahlbeck calculated that the size of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe was at least half a million, and might have been well over one million already by the turn of the millennium.<sup>16</sup> His estimate included between 325,000 and 660,000 Kurds in Germany; between 50,000 and 120,000 in France; between 35,000 and 80,000 in the Netherlands, between 20,000 and 60,000 in Austria; between 20,000 and 70,000 in Switzerland, between 20,000 and 50,000 in the United Kingdom, between 16,000 and 40,000 in Sweden; and between 10,000 and 60,000 in Belgium, as well as sizeable communities of several thousand Kurds in Greece, Denmark, Italy, Norway and Finland. Outside of the Middle East and Europe, there were already at the turn of the millennium significant and well-established Kurdish communities in the USA (25,000 - 75,000) and Canada (10,000 - 50,000). After the turn of the millennium the size of the Kurdish diaspora has continued to grow, both in Europe and worldwide. Thus, a modest estimate is that the global Kurdish diaspora includes at least two million people in 2017.

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<sup>16</sup> Wahlbeck, "Kurds in Europe," p. 76.

## Countries of Settlement

In the case of Germany, labour migration from Turkey was already extensive in the 1960s. This was followed by the migration of family members after a halt to labour recruitment in 1973<sup>17</sup>. Meyer-Ingwersen estimated that the number of Kurds in Germany in the early 1990s was 580,000, and that 550,000 of these originated from Turkey.<sup>18</sup> About one fourth of the two million Turkish immigrants in Germany are of Kurdish descent, which is a proportion that most researchers seem to agree upon.<sup>19</sup> The Kurdish national movement and political mobilisation have had a great impact on the Kurdish communities in Germany, which includes a second and third generation of Kurds in Germany. The identification as Kurds became more explicit in the 1980s and 1990s, and it has been suggested that very few of the Kurdish labour migrants would have called themselves Kurdish in the early 1970s.<sup>20</sup> The ethnic mobilisation of Kurds seems to have happened largely as a response to

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<sup>17</sup> Castles, de Haas and Miller, *The Age of Migration*; Abadan-Unat, *Turks in Europe*.

<sup>18</sup> Johannes Meyer-Ingwersen, "Die kurdische Minderheit," in *Ethnische Minderheiten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, ed. by Cornelia Schmalz-Jacobsen and Georg Hansen (München: C.H.Beck, 1995), p. 318.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Birgit Ammann, "Kurds in Germany," p. 1011; Jochen Blaschke, "Kurdische Communities," p. 2.1.1; Svenja Falk, "Dimensionen kurdischer Ethnizität und Politisierung: Das ethnic revival von Kurden in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," *Zeitschrift für Türkeistudien* 1 (1998), p. 75.

<sup>20</sup> Claus Leggewie, "How Turks Became Kurds, Not Germans," *Dissent* 43 (1996), pp. 79-83; Martin van Bruinessen, "Shifting National and Ethnic Identities: The Kurds in Turkey and the European Diaspora," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18 (1998), p. 45; Falk, "Dimensionen kurdischer Ethnizität," p. 75-93; Siamend Hajo and Eva Savelsberg, "Yezidische Kurden in Celle:

the discrimination they face in Germany. The Kurds in Germany experienced problems being accepted as an ethnic group, distinct from the Turks. German scholars suggested that in the 1980s there was a negative stigmatisation of Kurds in Germany as “less-worthy Turks”<sup>21</sup>. In the 1980s and 1990s, refugee migration replaced labour migration in Germany. Since the 1980s, Germany has received by far the largest number of asylum applications of all countries in Europe. Germany has been the main destination of refugees from Turkey, Iraq and Iran in most years since the 1990s. Not surprisingly, Germany was also the main receiving state during the European asylum crisis in the year 2015, receiving more than one million asylum seekers. Most asylum seekers in Europe in 2015 came from Syria (The proportion of Kurds among the asylum seekers in 2015 is not known, but at least some of the asylum seekers from Iraq and Syria were Kurds). In any case, the number of Kurds continues to grow rapidly in Germany in the 2000s.

The large numbers of Kurds in France, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland and Belgium can also be attributed mainly to previous labour migration from Turkey. Thus, a clear majority of the Kurds in these countries originate from Turkey, and there is a rapidly growing second and third, generation of Kurds. However, the Kurdish populations in these countries have also been significantly affected by subsequent refugee migrations. In France, the proportion of Iranian Kurds is relatively high in comparison to many other European countries. France has received many students, and after 1979, refugees from Iran. Correspondingly, since the 1970s, the United Kingdom has been a significant host to students from Iraq, who were later followed by Kurdish asylum

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Eine qualitative Untersuchung,” *Kurdische Studien* 1 (2001), 1, 17-52; Birgit Ammann, *Kurden in Europa: Ethnizität und Diaspora* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Falk, “Dimensionen kurdischer Ethnizität,” p. 75-93; Şengül Şenol, *Kurden in Deutschland: Fremde unter Fremden* (Frankfurt am Main: Haag und Herchen, 1992).

seekers from Iraq. Kurds from Turkey have mainly arrived in the UK since the late 1980s.<sup>22</sup> In the 2000s, Britain continue to be a destination for refugees from all parts of Kurdistan.

In Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland, the Kurdish communities are mainly a consequence of refugee migration, which has been occurring in relatively large numbers since the 1980s. It should also be noted that several thousand refugees from Iran and Iraq have been resettled in the Nordic countries under the UNHCR resettlement program - these resettled groups include a substantial number of Kurds. Thus, the proportion of Kurds from Iran and Iraq is larger in these Nordic countries than in the countries that were the principal destinations of earlier labour migration from Turkey. There are also many other European countries with significant Kurdish populations in the 2000s. Italy, Greece, Slovenia, Romania, and the Czech Republic have experienced an arrival of many Kurdish asylum seekers since the late 1990s, but these countries tend to be transit countries rather than destination countries.

In the 2000s, large numbers of Kurds arrived in countries that were unaffected by the arrival of Kurdish and Turkish labour migrants in the 1960s and 1970s. Consequently, although the Kurds are the most numerous in countries with a history of Kurdish and Turkish labour migration, today significant numbers of Kurds can be found in a wide variety of countries. This change in the character of the migration patterns is also clearly visible in industrialised countries outside Europe. Refugees have to a large extent replaced labour migrants in traditional immigration countries like Canada, USA and Australia. Kurds from Turkey arrived as labour migrants in Australia already in

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<sup>22</sup> Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*, p. 72-4.

the second half of the 1960s.<sup>23</sup> Since the second half of the 1980s, the majority of Kurds arriving in Australia have been from Iraq and Iran; many of them were resettled by the UNHCR resettlement programs. Likewise, Iranian and Iraqi refugees have arrived in large numbers in North America. In the US, Kurdish refugees arrived from Iraq after 1976, followed by Kurdish refugees from Iran after 1979.<sup>24</sup> According to media reports, a large and vibrant Kurdish community of more than 10,000 Kurds is found in Nashville, Tennessee. It is still not clear how the Kurds will be affected by the more restrictive refugee policies in the US during the presidency of Donald Trump. In general, because of the increasingly restrictive immigration and asylum policies in many of the traditional destination countries, Kurdish refugees may increasingly be forced to seek asylum globally in the future. For example, there are media reports that Kurdish migrants and refugees arrive in increasing numbers in South America in the 2000s, and many Kurdish asylum seekers from Turkey have arrived in Japan since the late 1990s.

Because of the increasingly global character of refugee migration, Kurdish refugees can be found in almost any country of the world. European countries are still the home of most Kurds living outside of Middle East. The established Kurdish communities in Europe and the transnational social ties of the communities tend to make Europe the preferred destination also among new migrants and refugees. However, the increasingly restrictive immigration and refugee policies in Europe in the 2000s have made it more difficult to reach Europe and have increased the relative importance of other destinations worldwide.

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<sup>23</sup> James Jupp, "Kurds," in *The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins*, ed. by James Jupp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 549.

<sup>24</sup> Pary Karadaghi, "The Status of the Kurdish Diaspora in the United States," in *Kurdish Exodus*, pp. 102-7.

## **The Restrictive Refugee Policies in Europe in the 2000s**

The hostile policies in Europe to refugees and immigration are characterized by both a decline in the acceptance rates of asylum applications, as well as different measures to prevent asylum seekers from reaching the borders of the European Union. In another move to discourage asylum seekers, welfare benefits for asylum seekers have been cut in many European countries. Furthermore, visa restrictions are imposed in order to minimize the influx of asylum seekers. There are also international agreements made with transit countries in order to stop individuals traveling without proper visas and passports before they reach Western Europe. The agreement between Turkey and the EU in 2016, to stop the arrival of Syrian refugees in Greece, is only one example of these agreements made by the EU.

For most refugees and displaced persons, obtaining a passport and visa is, in practice, impossible. Furthermore, the most efficient measure taken to prevent refugees from applying for asylum has been the heavy fines imposed on transport companies for each person they bring into the country, intentionally or unintentionally, without proper documentation. In this way, migration control has largely been transferred from state authorities to private airlines and shipping companies. The tendency to prevent asylum seekers and so called “illegal immigrants” from entering a country is a general trend in Europe, and there is also an explicit ambition amongst the European Union member states to harmonize immigration policies in this respect. The European countries are still parties to the United Nations Refugee Convention, but extensive measures are imposed to prevent people from applying for asylum.

The desperate attempts to reach Europe made by refugees across the Mediterranean Sea have to been seen as being related to the above-mentioned policies. Refugees have to rely to a great extent on the help of expensive “travel agents” in order to be able to reach Western Europe. Refugee “trafficking” has become a profitable illegal business. Many refugees do not survive the dangerous trips to Western Europe and drown on the open sea or suffocate in trucks. The restrictive migration policies have been accompanied by an increasing number of deaths at the borders of Europe. In 2016, the number of people who drowned fleeing to Europe via the Mediterranean reached more than 5,000, according to the official data of the UNHCR.

Thus, the number of asylum seekers arriving in Europe is not indicative of the number of people who are in need of asylum. Only a few have the possibility to apply for asylum in Europe. It requires a lot of money, effort and good luck for a Kurdish refugee to arrive in Western Europe in the 2000s. The situation today is very different from in the 1960s, when many refugees would have been able to travel to Europe as labour migrants without even having to apply for asylum. Furthermore, the restrictive asylum policies have diminished the possibilities to get asylum in Europe, which undoubtedly will increase the proportion of Kurdish refugees in other parts of the world.

### **Social and Economic Integration**

The economic and political landscape of Europe has changed significantly since the labour migrants arrived in the 1960s. Unemployment and hostile migration policies are clearly more salient today. The attitude towards refugees often came as a surprise to the asylum seekers, who are not prepared



for the bureaucratic procedures and all the other difficulties they encounter in Europe.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, newly arrived migrants experience a difficult economic integration in the labour market, which the labour migrants did not experience in the post-war period.

A key question for the future of the Kurdish diaspora is the pattern of economic integration in the society of settlement. Among migrants in general, the first generation tend to have a precarious labour market position, and for the future of the diaspora it is essential that later generations find better possibilities of economic integration. Recently arrived migrants often find themselves integrated at low levels of the labour market. However, the Kurds can often use their own informal social networks to create or find jobs. For example, in many countries in Western Europe, there has been a separate Turkish and Kurdish ethnic labour market in which the Kurdish refugees from Turkey were able to find some form of employment.

There is variation in the reception, resettlement and integration policies among the European countries, which is largely due to fundamental differences in the way the welfare, health and social services in general are organised. The economic and social situation of Kurds may vary depending on the policies of the country of settlement. However, a well-established Kurdish community always plays a positive role for integration through the support networks and voluntary associations within the community. With the help of social networks in the community, newly arrived migrants may become integrated in the labour market, although this integration initially may occur on the lowest socio-economic level.

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<sup>25</sup> Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*, 88-95.

The variation in integration policies is also reflected in the role played by Kurdish organisations in respective countries. For example, in the Nordic countries, refugee reception and resettlement are organised by the public sector within the framework of an extensive welfare state in a relatively centralised system of governance. In this type of society, NGOs play a less central role in providing services to refugees. Thus, the Kurdish organisations in the Nordic countries are often small local organisations with mainly cultural activities. In contrast, countries that largely rely on charities and NGOs to organise the resettlement of refugees also provide a possibility for Kurdish organisations to play an active role in helping newly arrived refugees. For example, this is the case in Britain, where the Kurdish community centers in London have a number of important activities for refugees and migrants.<sup>26</sup>

### **Political Activity and Kurdish Diaspora Organisations**

The Kurdish communities can be regarded as highly politicized in terms of homeland politics. The growth in both the total number and the proportion of political refugees among the Kurds in Europe has changed the character of the Kurdish diaspora. Although the Kurds in Europe have always been politically active, the influx of political refugees has further emphasized the politicisation of the

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<sup>26</sup> Alessio D'Angelo, "Migrant Organisations: Embodied Community Capital?" in *Migrant Capital: Networks, Identities and Strategies*, ed. by Louise Ryan, Umut Erel, and Alessio D'Angelo, 83-101 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Ipek Demir, "Battling with Memleket in London: The Kurdish Diaspora's Engagement with Turkey," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38 (2012), pp. 815-31; Östen Wahlbeck, "Community Work and Exile Politics: Kurdish Refugee Associations in London," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 11 (1998), pp. 215-30.

communities.<sup>27</sup> The political and cultural mobilisation of the community has been supported by the continuous migration from Kurdistan. In many ways, the Kurdish diaspora continues to be influenced by contemporary political developments inside Kurdistan. The struggle for recognition and a homeland of their own in the Middle East greatly influences Kurdish identity in exile. The transnationalism of the community and the diasporic Kurdish identity seems to be characteristic features common among Kurdish communities all over the world. Clearly, political developments in Turkey and the Middle East have a direct bearing on social relations and political activities among Kurds in the diaspora. Thus, the ethnic mobilisation and political activism of Kurdish refugees in Europe cannot be properly understood unless we take into account the transnational context in which these occur, a fact that has been described in different ways in several studies of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Omar Sheikhmous, "Kurdish Kultur und Politik im Exil," in *Kurden im Exil* (Vol. 3) (Berlin: Edition Parabolis, 1993). pp. 2.12.1-11; Bruinessen, "Shifting National and Ethnic Identities"; Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*; Alynna J. Lyon and Emek M. Uçarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict: Kurdish separatism in Germany and the PKK," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24 (2001), pp. 925-48; Vera Eccarius-Kelly, "Political Movements and Leverage Points: Kurdish Activism in the European Diaspora," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 22 (2002), pp. 91-118.; Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, *Transnational Politics: The Case of Turks and Kurds in Germany* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Bruinessen, "Shifting National and Ethnic Identities"; Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*; Ammann, *Kurden in Europa*; David Griffiths, *Somali and Kurdish Refugees in London: New Identities in the Diaspora* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Østergaard-Nielsen, *Transnational Politics*; Minoo Alinia, *Spaces of Diasporas: Kurdish Identities, Experiences of Otherness and Politics of Belonging* (Göteborg: Göteborg University, 2004); Ann-Catrin Emanuelsson, *Diaspora Global Politics:*

The homeland orientation seems to have many different and varied functions for the Kurdish communities. This political activity serves the function of reinforcing a Kurdish identity and also provides an opportunity for Kurds to unite and work for the improvement of their situation, both in Kurdistan and in the diaspora. An indication of the Kurdish political activities in the diaspora are the multitude of different organisations and associations among the Kurds in most countries. There are both well-organised organisations with a more specific and transnational political agenda, and small local organisations with social and cultural activities for the local community. In the initial stages, Kurdish organisations in exile are often connected to Kurdish political movements in Kurdistan. The political parties in Kurdistan are very broad in their activities and constitute an integral part of the everyday life and the social structure of Kurdish society. The connection to Kurdish politics can therefore be either explicit, or more diffuse and indirect, but the Kurdish organisations are in the initial stages always in some way influenced by the political and social divisions and allegiances in Kurdistan. In the 2000s, some well-established organisations display elaborate transnational political networks of importance both in Europe and the Middle East.<sup>29</sup>

On the one hand, a political activism often leads to internal divisions in the refugee communities. On the other hand, the same issues that divide the refugee community as a whole can unite smaller

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*Kurdish Transnational Networks and Accommodation of Nationalism* (Göteborg: Göteborg University, 2005); Khayati, *From Victim Diaspora*.

<sup>29</sup> Emanuelsson, *Diaspora Global Politics*; Khayati, *From Victim Diaspora*; Bahar Baser; Ann-Catrin Emanuelsson and Mari Toivanen, “(In)visible spaces and tactics of transnational engagement: A multi-dimensional approach to the Kurdish diaspora,” *Kurdish Studies* 3 (2015), 2, pp. 128-50.

groups of refugees who share the same political beliefs and background in the country of origin. Thus, small local organisations thrive and multiply in refugee communities. Political disagreements are often a source of serious conflicts within the Kurdish communities, but political mobilisation has still enabled the establishment of well-functioning organisations of a more limited nature.<sup>30</sup>

The ambition of Kurdish organisations is often to represent the Kurdish community as a whole, but most organisations are actually small local organisations. The activities of the local organisations are often concentrated on cultural and social activities for fellow Kurds. The Newroz (Kurdish New Year) celebration is common example of these cultural activities. The Newroz celebration is important for the Kurds in the diaspora, as it gives them an opportunity to celebrate a Kurdish identity and culture. This ancient spring celebration among the Kurds and the Persians today has become a political manifestation. Most Kurdish associations strive to organise their own Newroz parties, and the celebration is often also a political manifestation of the strength of the political party that the association supports. Important dates in the recent history of the Kurdish political parties might also be publicly celebrated or remembered. For example, among Kurdish refugees from Iraq, the remembrance of the massacre in the town of Halabja on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1988 has been an annual event. These various occasions constitute “community moments”<sup>31</sup> that include some and deter others, through a sense of unity around central cultural symbols.

### **A Transnational Community and a Future Global Diaspora**

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<sup>30</sup> Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*; Emanuelsson, *Diaspora Global Politics*; Khayati, *From Victim Diaspora*; D’Angelo, “Migrant Organisations”.

<sup>31</sup> Hannah Lewis, “Community Moments: Integration and Transnationalism at ‘Refugee’ Parties and Events,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 23 (2010), pp. 571-88.

The relationship to Kurdistan is strengthened by the continuous transnational social ties between country of settlement and country of origin. The continuous arrival of new refugees from Kurdistan in many ways keep the relationship with the “homeland” topical and vital. The unsolved political crises in the Middle East and a continuous persecution of Kurds can be expected to create refugees also in the future. It can also be expected that a constant arrival of new refugees will support the ethnic and political mobilisation of the Kurdish diaspora in the future as well. The orientation towards the ‘homeland’ should not be seen as a hindrance to integration. A strong community among the Kurds can also be transferred into a resource facilitating integration into the new country of settlement. The transnational social relations and an diasporic identity constitute resources both for the community as a whole and for individual Kurds. The transnational political and cultural mobilisation brings people together and create strong social ties among people with the same background and with similar experiences. The strong social networks can also be used as a resource for integration into the society of settlement. One example is how social networks can be utilised to find employment. The social relations that have developed as a consequence of political activism may in this context be utilised for a completely different purpose.

Studies indicate that the Kurds in Europe uphold a strong Kurdish identity and the Kurdish communities have developed into new ethnic minorities in the countries of settlement. In many different ways the Kurds in diaspora also have a continuous relation to Kurdistan as a “homeland”, either as a region or as an idea. The transnationalism of the community, together with a strong political homeland project, suggests that there is reason to describe the Kurds as a diaspora. A diasporic identity is not limited to the first generation, but also later generations continue to identify as Kurds, although the meaning of the Kurdish identity changes in later generations. Among later generations the Kurdish identity can be strong, despite the fact that it is no longer rooted in the

geographical region of Kurdistan, but connected to identity politics in the societies of settlement.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the awareness of belonging to a separate people with a specific identity and history might even become stronger and more visible among the Kurds living in the diaspora. The continuous dispersal of Kurdish refugees and migrants worldwide will create diaspora communities that together will constitute a well-established global diaspora in the future.

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<sup>32</sup> For example, Susanne Schmidt, *Kurdisch-Sein und nicht -Sein: Einblicke in Selbstbilder von Jugendlichen kurdischer Herkunft* (Bonn: NAVEND, 1998); Susanne Schmidt, *Kurdisch -Sein, mit deutschem Pass!* (Bonn: NAVEND, 2000); Barzoo Eliassi, *Contesting Kurdish Identities in Sweden: Quest for Belonging among Middle Eastern Youth* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Mari Toivanen, *Negotiating Home and Belonging: Young Kurds in Finland* (Turku: University of Turku, 2014); Minoo Alinia and Barzoo Eliassi, "Temporal and generational impact on identity, home(land) and politics of belonging among the Kurdish diaspora;" *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 4 (2014), 2, pp. 73-81.

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